



### **Trends in the Federal Elections in Pakistan 2018**

*Dr Dhrubajyoti Bhattacharjee\**

Pakistan will be holding its thirteenth general elections on July 25, 2018. In the last federal elections of 2013, Nawaz Sharif's Pakistan Muslim League–Nawaz (PML-N) was able to form the government by winning 166 seats out of a total of 342 in the National Assembly.

Already a caretaker government under the leadership of former Chief Justice of Pakistan (CJP), Nasir-ul-Mulk is in place from June 1<sup>st</sup>, 2018. CJP Nasir-ul-Mulk headed the commission that enquired into allegations of rigging in the 2013 elections and had received the support of all parties. By law, the caretaker government will take care of day to day governance and assist the Election Commission of Pakistan (ECP) to conduct the elections. The ECP will supervise the entire process and has the responsibility to organize and conduct elections. It will take necessary steps so that the elections are free and fair and in accordance with law.

There have been major political incidents that have moulded Pakistan politics in the last few years. One has witnessed the case of the Panama papers in 2016, which rocked Pakistan politics. It revealed links of offshore companies and assets of the Sharif family including Nawaz Sharif. This led to the formation of a Joint Investigation Team (JIT) in April, 2017 by the Supreme Court. A Supreme Court bench on July 2017, after receiving the report from JIT, decided that Nawaz Sharif was dishonest and not fit to carry on as the Prime Minister of Pakistan as per Article 62 and 63 of the Pakistani constitution. Nawaz Sharif was removed from the post of Prime Minister as well as from the National Assembly. The Supreme Court in March 2018 came out with

the verdict that he cannot be part of PML-N or any other political party. Later, in April 2018, the court clarified that as per Article 62 and 63, Nawaz Sharif will never be able to contest elections in his whole life. So for the first time, post-November 1988 elections, Nawaz Sharif will not be contesting for the position of the Prime Minister. The accountability court finally passed the verdict on July 6<sup>th</sup> 2018, handing Nawaz Sharif ten years jail time and Maryam Sharif seven years jail time in the Avenfield properties corruption case.

Another political event since the last 2013 elections is the meteoric rise of Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) and Imran Khan from a regional political party to a mainstream national party. It has been stated by analysts that Imran Khan and his party was getting the support of the Pakistani Army, and it would prevent PML-N from regaining power.<sup>1</sup> The connection between PTI and the Army-judiciary combine was apparent when a (PTI) candidate Nasir Cheema from Gujranwala's constituency PP-62, used pictures of both the army chief and chief justice of Pakistan (CJP) in his campaign advertisements and posters. He has been asked to reply to a show cause to the CEC.

Zulfiqar Hussain Bukhari is funding the PTI's election campaign and in-charge of it in NA-53 (comprising most urban areas of Islamabad and Bhara Kahu) where Imran Khan is contesting. Bukhari has been accused of holding offshore properties worth millions, and was placed on the Exit Control List (ECL). It became news when he was allowed to travel along with Khan to Saudi Arabia. However, the Islamabad High Court swiftly ordered the removal of Bukhari's name from the ECL on July 6<sup>th</sup>, 2018. The courts have arrested Fawad Hasan Fawad, former secretary to Nawaz Sharif, and implementation secretary to Shahbaz Sharif, on Ashiyana Housing Project scam. Continuous notices are being issued by the National Accountability Bureau (NAB) to Shahbaz Sharif to appear before the NAB on the Saaf Pani Company Project scam.

Pakistan People's Party under the leadership of Bilawal Bhutto and Asif Ali Zardari, has not regained the position it lost in the 2013 elections, by winning only 42 seats. Though PTI's position is strong in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, having the support of the Pakhtuns, it has attempted to make inroads in other provinces, as the leadership crisis continues in PML-N.

After the dismissal of Nawaz Sharif, the civilian government in Pakistan under Shahid Khaqan Abbasi was hostage, multiple times on various issues, to radical Islamic political parties, which staged protests, blocked major roads and paralyzed major parts of cities for weeks. Some of the protests ended with violence and loss of life and property. However, all the time, the civilian

government gave in to the demands of the protestors, strengthening their will, legitimizing their position. This election will see those religious political parties like Tehreek-e-Labbaik Ya Rasool Allah (TLY), Tehreek-e-Labbaik Pakistan, and the like making an impact on the elections. Though the Election Commission of Pakistan has rejected the application of registering Milli Muslim League (MML) as a political party, which was a political face of Jamaat-ud Dawa and Hafiz Saeed, the candidates of MML will be contesting elections from the platform of Allah-o-Akhbar Tehreek (AAT), a lesser known party, already registered with the election authorities.<sup>2</sup>

MML is said to be supporting 256 candidates for both national and provincial assemblies from across the country, mostly from Punjab, contesting from the AAT platform. The TLY is fielding its candidates from all the four provinces. The group will contest the poll on the single-point agenda of Khatm-i-Nubuwat (finality of Prophethood).

With the decision of Tahirul Qadri's Pakistan Awami Tehreek to not contest the elections on June 23<sup>rd</sup> 2018, a space has been created for these fringe parties to play an important role in vote sharing.

The united front of the Jamiat Ulema-e Islam -Fazal (JUI-F), Jamiat Ahle Hadith (JAH), Tehreek-i-Islami (TI), Jamiat Ulema-i-Pakistan (JUP) and the Jamaat-i-Islami (JI), the Muttahida Majlis-e-Amal (MMA) will also remain a force to reckon with, especially in provinces like Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. The constituents of this united front stated that Pakistani foreign policy till date has been dictated by other powers and the nation did not have an independent foreign policy. The MMA pledged to formulate an independent and dignified foreign policy so that Pakistan could have relations with other countries on an equal footing. It also mentions implementation of Shariat laws and devolution of power to the grassroot level, amongst others, in its manifesto.

The Pakistan Army under General Bajwa has maintained the stand of abiding by the Constitution and protecting the democratic machinery. However, the Supreme Court has been instrumental in keeping the Army in the loop, sometimes by keeping members of the Army in the JIT, which investigated the Sharifs, or by curbing the voice of media houses, which went against the Army and the decisions of the Court. The closeness of the Court and the military is well known in Pakistan, which can be traced back to the days of the Rawalpindi Conspiracy of 1951.<sup>3</sup>

Both PML-N and PPP have also announced their respective election manifestoes. The PML-N manifesto (published on July 5<sup>th</sup>) pledges judicial reforms, raising growth rate to 7 per cent, eliminating poverty by 2030, creating 100,000-200,000 jobs, opening Pakistan to the world,

holding dialogue with India to reduce tensions on an equal and strictly reciprocal basis for regional peace, as well as fortifying ties with China and developing ties with Russia, among others. Before the manifesto was published they had stated that they will aim to provide speedy and inexpensive justice to the masses. In keeping with that pledge, the manifesto has promised to establish *Awami Adalat* (public courts) in easily accessible locations. In 2013, their manifesto had put strengthening the economy as top priority while energy crisis got the second spot; besides, it also pledged to end corruption, provide of employment and deliver quick, inexpensive justice. It also vowed to conduct local body elections across the country after assuming power, which was conducted in 2015. But the issues of corruption and shortage of energy will remain challenges for the party. They still take the credit for bringing the China Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC), coordinating with the Pakistan Army in countering terrorism, the Orange Line metro, establishing various energy projects and the like. In 2013, the PML-N had made providing employment a top priority, which they were not able to achieve. But it seems that the party is confident that, if elected, it can pull off a quick recovery in the area of employment and the financial sector as a whole, in part because of the megawatts added to the national energy grid during its tenure. The party has chosen Shahbaz Sharif as its prime ministerial candidate.

The PPP manifesto (published on June 28<sup>th</sup>) is more or less a replica of its past manifestoes. Titled '*BB ka wada nibhana hai Pakistan bachana hai*' (We have to fulfill BB's promise and save Pakistan). It stresses on freeing people from hunger, thirst and helplessness, rebuilding the economy, deepening democracy by fostering harmony among the people, securing rights and peace and reclaiming Pakistan's rightful place in the world. It can be seen that most of these pledges are contained both in the 2008 and in the 2013 manifestoes. Its 2013 manifesto mentioned about legislation to give labour representatives seats in the legislatures, to spend 4.5 percent of GDP on education by term-end, to provide a youth employment initiative called the People's Employment Programme and improve the living standard of the people. It, however, lacked leadership, as Asif Ali Zardari was barred by the courts and CEC from contesting elections in 2013 because of charges of corruption. He will, however, be contesting elections this year. Bilawal though from 2013 till date has matured politically, but might not be able to counter the popularity level of the Sharif's yet. There is no clear announcement regarding the prime ministerial candidate yet. Senior members though have advised Bilawal to stay away from Zardari, due to the latter's corruption linkages.

Imran Khan announced his election manifesto on July 9<sup>th</sup>, 2018 titled “Road to Naya Pakistan”. The manifesto clearly states that one of the primary motives of PTI is to turn Pakistan into an Islamic welfare state. Khan stated that he will make the National Accountability Bureau autonomous, so that it will be able to pursue all corruption cases. He pledged to bring in comprehensive judicial reforms, promote politics of understanding in Balochistan, strengthen the movement for attaining a south Punjab province, and empower Gilgit Baltistan. Promising to create 10 million jobs, he spoke about strengthening small to mid-level industries. The manifesto spoke about building dams, bringing educational reforms in schools, religious seminaries and vocational institutions. It also spoke about defeating the terrorists’ narrative and tackling the internal threats that the country faces.

In the present context, it can be stated that PML-N, PTI and PPP showed restraint in using the Kashmir card in their election manifestoes. Both PML-N and PTI have mentioned that they would make attempts to resolve the Kashmir issue in accordance with UN resolutions. PPP will seek to have a pro-active foreign policy. However, in their speeches, they haven’t shown much restraint. Bilawal stated that by proactive foreign policy, he means he will raise the issue of human rights violations taking place in Jammu and Kashmir in every fora. Maryam Nawaz, while delivering a provocative speech in Muzzafarabad in February 2018, said she looked forward to delivering such a speech in Srinagar when it will be a part of Pakistan, and according to her, that day is not far away.<sup>4</sup>

The courts remain in a dilemma with regard to Musharraf, who challenged the authority of the court by declaring a national emergency in 2007, confining senior judges to their houses as well as dismissing more than 100 judges from the court. Naming it treason against the state, he was put on trial, then allowed to travel abroad for health reasons, called back numerous times, and declared a ‘proclaimed absconder’. A verdict by the Peshawar High Court on March 2018 sought the issuance of an arrest warrant as well as confiscation of all his property in Pakistan. However, the Supreme Court on June 7<sup>th</sup> allowed Musharraf to file his nomination paper for the forthcoming elections on the condition that he presented himself before the court on June 14<sup>th</sup> and assured that Musharraf will not be arrested. But as his counsel informed the court that Musharraf will not be able to appear within that time and sought a later date, the court withdrew the permission for contesting elections, and authorized the government to suspend his passport and his computerized national identity card (CNIC). At the time of writing this paper, that remains the stand of the court.

Another important factor was the issue of delimitation of constituencies that led to a conflict between the Election Commission and the political parties. The final delimitation of provinces was announced by the CEC in May 2018. However, petitions have been submitted seeking correction of discrepancies in delimitation of constituencies. But the Supreme Court rejected such petitions stating that the delimitation done by the CEC is final and cannot be altered.

There is also the factor of non-issuance of CNICs to specific communities, allegations of National Database and Registration Authority (NADRA) issuing CNIC's to foreigners, as well as allegations of illegal leak of voters' details for the General Election 2018 to 'unrelated people'.

Punjab, where the PML-N remains popular till now will be a key player in deciding the forthcoming elections. The health of Nawaz Sharif's wife, Kulsoom Nawaz, who is suffering from throat cancer, and recently had a heart attack in London is also pertinent. The dismissal and ten-year prison sentence to Nawaz Sharif and the health of Kulsoom Nawaz might attract sympathy votes. Both Nawaz and Maryam plan to return to Pakistan on July 13<sup>th</sup> to file an appeal against the decision. Federal law and information minister Ali Zafar has said that the government will implement the accountability court's orders in letter and spirit, and arrest Nawaz Sharif and Maryam Nawaz on their arrival at any airport in Pakistan.

Elections in Pakistan are also associated with widespread violence and rigging, which surfaces during each national and local level election. It is for this reason that the ECP has requested the Pakistan Army to take full charge of maintaining law and order during the period of campaign as well as during the elections. However, the ECP has not invited any international observer to assess the conduct of the 13<sup>th</sup> federal elections. With the return of Nawaz and Maryam to Pakistan, the electoral situation in Pakistan remains volatile.

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*\*Dr Dhrubajyoti Bhattacharjee, Research Fellow, Indian Council of World Affairs, New Delhi.*

*Disclaimer: The views expressed are that of the Researcher and not of the Council.*

## **Endnotes**

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<sup>1</sup> Ayesha Siddiqa, "Patronage and power plays in Pakistan's electoral politics", *East Asia Forum*, June 19, 2018, <http://www.eastasiaforum.org/2018/06/19/patronage-and-power-plays-in-pakistans-electoral-politics/> as accessed on June 19, 2018

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<sup>2</sup> “MML can’t contest elections, ECP rules”, *Pakistan Observer*, June 14, 2018, <https://pakobserver.net/mml-cant-contest-elections-ecp-rules/> as accessed on June 19, 2018

<sup>3</sup> The Chief of General Staff, Major General Akbar Khan who was responsible for making the first coup attempt in Pakistan against Prime Minister Liaquat Ali Khan along with other Army officers, was convicted and served a long term imprisonment. However, he and the other army personnel were given reprieve in 1957. He later rose to be the advisor to Zulfikar Ali Bhutto and became the Chief of National Security under Bhutto’s Prime Ministership.

<sup>4</sup> Maryam Nawaz Speech at Muzaffarabad Jalsa on Kashmir Solidarity, February 5, 2018, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=s6rfsxEjw-A>